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Barbeque Safety Tips

As the temperature heats up, millions of Americans are looking at their backyards as the perfect oasis to host friends and family for parties and casual get-togethers.

Cooking outdoors was once only a summer activity shared with family and friends. Now more than half of Americans say they are cooking outdoors year round. So whether the snow is blowing or the sun is shining brightly, it is important to know how to operate your grill and handle food safely.

General Safety Tips

Use the following safety tips to reduce the risk of injuries during backyard barbeques:

- Do not wear loose clothing while cooking at a barbecue.
- Keep all matches and lighters away from children. Teach your children to report any loose matches or lighters to an adult immediately.
- Supervise children around outdoor grills and never leave a grill unattended.
- Store and use your grill on a large flat surface that cannot burn.
- Have a fire extinguisher or a garden hose attached to a water supply nearby in case of a fire.
- Use long handled barbecue tools to reduce the risk of burns.
- Keep your grill clean and free of grease buildup that may lead to a fire. Always follow the manufacturer's cleaning and storing instructions.

Call 911 or your local emergency number if a burn warrants serious medical attention.

Charcoal Grill Safety Tips

While it burns, charcoal produces carbon monoxide (CO), a colorless, odorless gas that can accumulate to toxic levels in closed environments. Use the following tips to help keep your family safe from CO poisoning:

- Never burn charcoal inside of homes, vehicles, tents or campers, even if there is ventilation.
- Do not store the grill indoors with freshly used coals since they will continue to produce CO until the charcoal is completely extinguished.
- Be careful when using lighter fluid. Do not add fluid to an already lit fire because the flames can flashback up into the container and explode.

Dispose of hot coals properly by dousing them with plenty of water and stirring them to ensure that the fire is out. Never place hot coals in plastic, paper or wooden containers.

Gas Grill Safety Tips

Liquid petroleum (LP) gas or propane, used in gas grills, is extremely flammable and can lead to fires or explosions if not handled properly. It is important to take extra precautions with using a grill after a period of non-use or just after refilling and reattaching the propane tank.

Use the following tips to reduce your risk of injury from a gas grill:

- Check the tubes that lead into the burner for any blockage, and check to make sure that the connection between the propane tank and the fuel line is secure. Check all hoses for cracking, brittleness, holes, leaks or sharp bends.
- Do not overfill the gas tank.
- Move gas hoses as far away as possible from hot surfaces and dripping hot grease. If you cannot move the hoses, install a heat shield to protect them.
- If you detect a gas leak, immediately turn off the gas at the tank and do not attempt to light the grill until the leak is fixed by a qualified repair person.
- Place the grill at least 10 feet away from any building. Do not use the grill in a garage, carport, porch or under a surface that can catch fire.
- When lighting the grill, keep the top open. If the grill does not light in the first several attempts, wait five minutes to allow gas to dissipate.
- Use caution when storing gas containers. Always keep containers upright, and never store a spare gas container under or near the grill. Never store a full container indoors.

Transport the container in a secure, upright position. Never keep a filled container in a hot car or car trunk since the pressure in the tank will increase and may allow gas to leak out.

Barbecue Food Safety Tips

Use the following tips to handle and cook food safely on the grill:

- Plan to drive directly home from the grocery store. Always refrigerate perishable food within two hours (refrigerate within one hour when the temperature is above 90°F).

- Place meat and poultry in the refrigerator immediately. Freeze poultry and ground meat that won't be used in one or two days; freeze other meat within four to five days.
- Completely defrost meat and poultry before grilling so it cooks more evenly. Use the refrigerator for slow, safe thawing or thaw sealed packages in cold water. You can also use the microwave if the food will be placed immediately on the grill.
- Marinating meat and poultry is a great way to tenderize or add flavor. Marinate food in the refrigerator, not on the counter. If some of the marinade is to be used as a sauce on the cooked food, reserve a portion of the marinade before putting raw meat and poultry in it.
- Keep meat and poultry refrigerated until ready to use. Only take out the meat and poultry that will immediately be placed on the grill.
- When taking food off the grill, use a clean platter. To prevent food borne illness, don't use the same platter and utensils for raw and cooked meat and poultry. Harmful bacteria present in raw meat and poultry and their juices can contaminate safely cooked food.
- Cook food to a safe internal temperature to destroy harmful bacteria. Meat and poultry cooked on a grill often browns very fast on the outside, yet may still be undercooked in the middle. Use a food thermometer to be sure the food has reached a safe internal temperature. Whole poultry should reach 180°F; breasts, 170°F. Hamburgers made of ground beef should reach 160°F; ground poultry, 165°F. Beef, veal, and lamb steaks, roasts and chops can be cooked to 145°F. All cuts of pork should reach 160°F.
- After cooking meat and poultry on the grill, keep it hot until served - at 140°F or warmer. One way to keep cooked meats hot is by setting them to the side of the grill rack.
- Refrigerate any leftovers promptly in shallow containers. Discard any food left out more than two hours (one hour if temperatures are above 90°F).

To prevent charring, remove visible fat that can cause a flare up. Cook food in the center of the grill and move coals to the side to prevent fat and juices from dripping on them.

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